

From RCIA To The Eucharist

by Howard Ong

The Rite of Catholic Initiation for Adults (RCIA) prepares new members to join our Catholic faith; and helps baptised Catholics in renewing their faith. In our midst this year, we have 7 RCIA candidates inquiring and learning about our Catholic faith. For a few months now, these candidates and their sponsors have been attending weekly meetings, facilitated by a team of catechists. For those of you who have attended the Saturday vigil mass, you would also see our candidates presenting themselves at the altar after the homily, at a small ceremony called the Rite of Dismissal.

Having been involved with the RCIA ministry for more than a decade, it always gives a great sense of assurance seeing RCIA candidates among the congregation during mass. Why? Because it tells me that our Church is alive and well, that new members are being drawn to it year after year. In other words, the presence of RCIA candidates is a sacramental sign that God is at work in this community. That sense of assurance aside, the RCIA candidates also remind us not to take our faith for granted. The RCIA is a year-long journey requiring significant commitment and determination. And week-in-week-out, these candidates attend the mass but are not able to participate fully in the Eucharistic celebration. Their hope and desire is to journey towards Easter celebration, when they will for the first time be able to participate fully in the Eucharistic celebration. In the meantime, their presence at our weekly mass reminds the rest of us how precious the Eucharist is, and that we must never take it for granted.

At the Eucharist, we offer bread and wine to God. At the altar, the bread and wine is transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, while retaining their respective physical appearance, a mystery called *transubstantiation*. Ponder for a moment what the bread and wine are made of... The bread is countless grains of wheat blended into one. In the same way, the wine is countless globes of grapes blended into a drink. Thus, the bread and wine represents *us* - like them, we are many individuals but one community. When we offer bread and wine at the altar, we are in fact offering ourselves to the Lord. In return, He offers himself back to us, in the form of his precious Body and Blood. Then something amazing happens: Jesus invites us to come forth and consume him. Imagine, the Almighty God wanting to come into this sinful little old me! In awe, we repeat what the Roman Centurion said to our Lord, "I am not worthy to receive you, only say the word and I shall be healed."

On consumption of Jesus' Body and Blood, we fulfilled what our Lord promised us in John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in him bear much fruit." As I write this, it is the time of the year when the nectarine tree in my back garden is filled with red juicy nectarines. As I look at these juicy fruits hanging off the branches, it is not hard to realise that the branches by themselves cannot produce these fruits. It is only through the nutrient supplied by the tree trunk that the branches are able to produce the fruits. The Eucharist reminds us that we are the branches, Jesus is *that* trunk.

For a number of weeks now, a portrait of the Tree of Life hangs behind the baptismal font. Jesus is that tree. On the tree, you will find leaves inscribed with the name of our 7 RCIA candidates. The next time you attend mass, do come forward to take a look at the Tree of Life. And as a support for our candidates, I ask that you take down 1 or 2 of the candidates' names, and pray for them. May God bless you. Amen.

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